

Acts 19:21-41

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[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. Good to be back with you again. And we are continuing on in our series in the book of Acts. So you can see it up on the screen.

It's Acts chapter 19 and starting in verse 21 down to the end of the chapter. And if you have a church Bible with you, it's page 1116.

Let me find that as well. And we're coming to, this is part two. Tom started part one last week of kind of this scene in Ephesus.

And so we're coming to part two of this story in Ephesus and to see what goes on. So starting in Acts 19 verse 21, it says, After all this had happened, Paul decided to go to Jerusalem, passing through Macedonia and Achaia.

After I have been there, he said, I must visit Rome also. He sent two of his helpers, Timothy and Erastus, to Macedonia while he stayed in the province of Asia a little longer.

[1 : 11] About that time, there arose a great disturbance about the way. A silversmith named Demetrius, who made silver shrines of Artemis, brought in a lot of business for the craftsmen there.

He called them together along with the workers in related trades and said, You know, my friends, that we receive a good income from this business. And you see and hear how this fellow Paul has convinced and led astray large numbers of people here in Ephesus and in practically the whole province of Asia.

He says that gods made by human hands are no gods at all. There is danger not only that our trade will lose its good name, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis will be discredited and the goddess herself who is worshipped throughout the province of Asia and the world will be robbed of her divine majesty.

When they heard this, they were furious and they began shouting, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And soon the whole city was in an uproar. The people, they seized Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul's traveling companions from Macedonia, and all of them rushed into the theater together.

Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

[2 : 39] The assembly was in confusion. Some were shouting one thing, some another. Most of the people didn't even know why they were there. The Jews in the crowd pushed Alexander to the front and they shouted instructions to him.

He motioned for silence in order to make a defense before the people. But when they realized he was a Jew, they all shouted in unison for about two hours, Great is Artemis of the Ephesians! And the city clerk quietened the crowd and he said, Fellow Ephesians, doesn't all the world know that the city of Ephesus is the guardian of the temple of the great Artemis, and of our image which fell from heaven?

Therefore, since these facts are undeniable, you ought to calm down and not do anything rash. You have brought these men here, though they have neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.

If then Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a grievance against anybody, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. They can press charges. If there is anything further you want to bring up, it must be settled in a legal assembly.

[3 : 48] As it is, we are in danger of being charged with rioting because of what happened today. In that case, we would not be able to account for this commotion, since there is no reason for it.

And after he had said this, he dismissed the assembly. So over the last year, as we've worked our way through the Book of Acts, what you see again and again in this Book of Acts is the power of God.

You see the Holy Spirit working through the lives of believers, all the way from the very start at the day of Pentecost, in that room in Jerusalem, where all the apostles and disciples met, and the Holy Spirit is poured out in them.

And from that point on, the gospel of Jesus Christ starts to spread and spread and spread all around Jerusalem, Samaria, and all around the Roman world.

And last week we came to see how it spread throughout this city of Ephesus. And it was a city that was full of prestige, full of influence, full of power, and yet also it was a city full of darkness.

[5 : 09] It was full of the occult. It was a city that was wealthy, but much of that wealth came through dark means, through sorcery and magic, as we saw last week, through worship of the goddess Artemis, through buying idols, through prostitution.

It was certainly a powerful city, but it was filled with the powers of darkness. But last week, Tom finished with three words that I think stood out and summed up what that first half of the chapter was all about.

And it was this, ultimate power transforms. And this is what you see as Paul arrives into this city. You see the transforming power of God happening in this city.

You see the power of the baptizing of the Holy Spirit. You see power in the word of God, transforming lives as Paul taught the word of God in the lecture hall of Tyrannus, it says, for those two years.

We see power in the miracles and healings that were performed. We see power even in the judgment that was carried out by those who had falsely and misused the name of Jesus.

[6 : 30] Even those who had worshipped the dark and occultic powers had their lives transformed by the ultimate power of God. And what it showed is that God has the power to transform, even in a city like this.

And the power of the prince of darkness, the devil, what the power he has over us is thousands of times the power we have in and of ourselves.

But it's nothing compared to the power of God. And the power of God working in us and through us.

And so what you see from these verses and what we're going to look at today is three things.

And the first of all, we're going to see the effect that this ultimate power has on the city of Ephesus and how this relates to our situation here in Skibreen or around West Cork.

And then secondly, we want to look at the resistance or the rejection and the hostility of others to this transformation. And then finally, I want us to look at how do we go about actually letting this power work in us so that we may be able to withstand the hostility that may come our way and to live out transformed lives that will affect those living around us.

[7 : 56] Now we saw last week that the city of Ephesus was known for its worship of the occult. And we saw the importance of magic and spells and spell books to the city's economy.

But alongside that in Ephesus was also this temple to this goddess Artemis. And she was the goddess of fertility, the goddess of women giving birth.

And she was the goddess of death. And she was worshipped all around the ancient world. And there were over 33 shrines in different cities around the province of Asia.

But Ephesus was the main shrine and the main city where people would flock to worship her. And this shrine or this temple that was set up in Ephesus, it was no ordinary temple.

It was absolutely massive. It was the largest building in the Greek world at that time. It was four times the size of the Parthenon.

[9 : 01] You know, if you go outside to the football pitch, it was bigger than the football pitch outside there. So this was an enormous, enormous building made out of beautiful stone and pillars all around it and everything like that.

It was a majestic building. It was one of the greatest buildings in the world at that time. You know, it was considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

And every year people would flock to this temple in the springtime for a week-long festival called Artemisian. And they would celebrate and all sorts of immoral and evil practices would take place during this week.

And so you can see how important the worship of this goddess was to the local economy. And especially to these silversmiths that we meet here today led by, it seems like, this man Demetrius. And so first of all, as we look at this passage, the first thing you see is there's this bit of a disturbance, a bit of commotion going on in the city. And it's all about to do with this sect called the Way, with followers of Jesus.

[10:14] And it's led by this man Demetrius, who's a silversmith. He seems to be the leader of them. And he's getting worried about what's going on in the city. And he gathers together all the other silversmiths and craftsmen.

And he says to them, look, lads, we're going to have to do something about this fellow Paul. You know, this fellow Paul, he's telling everyone that these gods that we're making out of silver and clay and bronze and all these different metals, that they're no gods at all.

That they're only fake gods. You know, can you believe that? That Paul would go saying something like that, that these gods that we're making here are only fake. And one thing that stands out is that you see he and all the other tradespeople, they're worried.

They're worried because they feel that they might lose a lot of business because people are listening to this Paul and are following the way instead of worshipping their goddess Artemis.

And so that brings us to the first point of how transformed Christians or even transformed Christian communities will have a ripple effect on the surrounding culture.

[11:24] You know, when you throw a stone into a pond, it's going to have a ripple effect. Whether it's a little pebble or a massive giant stone when you throw into a pool of water.

You'll see the ripples go out and out and out and they will have an effect on the water meters and meters out. And it paints a picture of how much of an influence Christians and church can have on the surrounding culture.

And remember, Paul, he's been teaching about the way, about Christianity, about the gospel of Jesus for about two years in this lecture hall in Ephesus.

And so the teachings of Christianity and of what Jesus has done, they would have to some degree or another been known in the general population. You know, and it spread from all throughout all levels and rankings of society.

And we see in this passage that some of the officials, some of those who were in charge, they were called the Asiarchs. They were like mayors of the city. And they were believers.

[12:35] They were friends of Paul as well. So Christianity had spread all the way to the top of society, right down to the very bottom. And it was having such an effect in this city of Ephesus that it was causing this concern amongst the craftsmen.

And you know, it reminds me in a sense of, you know, when God first calls Abraham. At the very start in Genesis 12, he says to Abraham, and he gives him this promise, I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. And all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you. And you have this sense of when God is giving this promise to Abraham, it's not simply just to this one man Abraham.

It's to all Abraham's descendants. And ultimately, we see that fulfilled in Jesus as the Messiah and the Savior of the world.

That's ultimately how Abraham's descendants were going to be a blessing to the world and a light to the nations as we see Jesus becoming the Savior of the world.

[13:51] But also, I think, in a much broader sense, we see how, you know, even the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, and now us as God's people, how we are called to be this blessing to all those around us.

You know, we have a great purpose, not only to bring the gospel to people, and that is so important, but it's also to be a light to people, to be a blessing to those that are around us in our society, whether that's here in Skibreen or in Bantry or Doris or Damanway or wherever you're living here in West Cork.

We are to be a blessing to those around us. And you see that taking place all throughout history, God's people. You see it from the very start.

And even, I like to think of the example of Daniel. And Daniel and his three friends, they were taken off when King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Judah. And they were taken off into Babylon.

Three, four young boys taken off from their home country. And they rose up and they lived out their lives in such a way that they were honest, truthful, full of integrity.

[15:07] And Daniel eventually becomes one of the highest ranking officials in Babylon. And I suppose his life and the lives of his three friends, they played out in such a way that it came to the point where the worship of God, the worship of Yahweh spread throughout that empire.

And even the king, the most powerful person in the world, at that time, King Nebuchadnezzar came to a point of worshipping Yahweh, the God of Israel, over all his gods that he had there in Babylon. Or I think of, I remember reading the story of John Patton, who was a missionary to the islands in the New Hebrides. And he was, or today it's known as Vanuatu.

And he went to one of these islands and he spent about 15 years there. And it was called the Niwa. And when he first went there, the tribes people that were living on the island, they were full, they were cannibals really.

They were murderers, they were liars, they were thieves. You know, there was all this darkness going on on the island. And he said after the end of the 15 years, he said, I claimed a Niwa for Christ.

[16:21] And by the grace of God, a Niwa worships at the Savior's feet. And he wasn't saying that every single person on the island had become a Christian or anything like that.

But what he was saying is that the whole culture of the island, the people that were living, had been so transformed by the message of the gospel.

That now, instead of, you know, there was no killing of people, there was no cannibalism going on. You know, the whole island itself had become changed to reflect Jesus, to reflect his character and what he was like.

And, you know, there may be dramatic examples, but think of it now in 2025. Think of the effect that we have on the culture around us.

You know, whether you're in school, whether you're in work, whether you're volunteering in the community, whether you're meeting up with a friend for a coffee. You know, how you use your money, how you spend your time, what you do and what you say, affects so much the people that live around you.

[17:34] And even how we do things here in this church in Amazing Grace, you know, has an effect on the community around us. You know, how we look after this building here on a Sunday morning as we rent it out.

How we interact with the GEA to own this building. You know, there's so many things that, you know, every moment I'd say that you spend with someone, you are having a positive or a negative impact or effect on their lives.

And so we can have both a negative or a positive effect. But as a church, we are called to have this positive effect on the community around us.

And you see the effect that the church in Ephesus was having on those around them. And we're told in the verses that Tom read last week, we are told that the Jews and the Greeks living in that city, they held the name of Jesus in high honor.

And the question for us is, do we live in such a way that the people around us, they can see Jesus coming out of us, that they, and when they see the reflection of Jesus in our lives, that they will then honor and respect Jesus and who he is and what he's done for them.

[18:57] And so I suppose there's a great responsibility on each one of us to live in such a way that we would reflect Jesus to those around us.

But we also know that, you know, while some will hold Jesus in high honor, there will be others who will reject that notion and they will instead become hostile towards Christianity and to the church. And, you know, this brings me to the second point is that transformed Christians will often face rejection and hostility from the surrounding culture.

And this is what you see taking place here in Ephesus with Demetrius and the other craftsmen. You know, they're hostile towards the Christians. Number one, because it's affecting their business. And secondly, because they feel that the honor that is going or that should be going to their god, Artemis, is now being given to this Jesus that Paul is preaching about.

[19:59] And so this man, Demetrius, he fires them all up. And, you know, the image I have is, I don't know if you ever watched the movie Shrek, but at the start you have a mob of peasants with pitchforks and they're all out to get this ogre, Shrek, and they're all there with their torches shouting

and they don't really know exactly what's going on, but they're all just going to run after this ogre, Shrek.

And I don't know, I suppose they probably didn't have pitchforks in Ephesus, but they've had plenty of other tools. They had hammers and tongs and all these blacksmithing tools. And the image you have is this one fellow gets everyone worked up about Paul and they in turn, they get others worked up.

And they start shouting, you know, great is Artemis of the Ephesians and they get everyone in the city worked up and they find Paul's two companions, Gaius and Aristarchus, and they drag them out and they drag them down to the theatre.

And the whole city is in an uproar. And it says that some people, they're shouting one thing, some people are shouting another thing, and it says that most people don't even know why they're there in the first place.

And you have just this complete chaotic city in disarray. And it says for two hours, could you imagine that, shouting for two hours non-stop, great is Artemis of the Ephesians.

[21 : 21] And then in the middle of it all, you have Paul. And he's trying to get into the crowd and he wants to set things straight. He wants to get into the middle of them and say something to them.

But you have his friends there trying to, no, Paul, just go away, just stay away from them. But what's interesting is, you see that it only took one person to stir up this huge crowd.

One person who saw the effect that Christianity was having in the city and who became hostile towards it. And we may not see that here in Ireland today, but we do see it around the rest of the world.

You know, these sorts of events, we might look at them and read them here and almost laugh at them at how comical it seems. And yet, around the world, this is what still takes place to some of our brothers and sisters.

You know, in India, we see churches being burned down by angry Hindu mobs. We see Christians being abducted and killed and raped in Nigeria.

[22 : 32] I remember when I was growing up, I would write a letter to, I had a pen pal in Peru, and his name was Linder. And when he was four years old, there was these people who came and cut off his ears and shot his father right there where he was.

And I would write, we'd write back and forth. He had to go to an orphanage then in Peru. But, you know, just thinking about that, it's not the experience we have here, maybe, that's serious.

But it is around the world for so many of our Christian brothers and sisters. But, looking at that and seeing how serious it is around the world, I think we can, each one of us can still understand that to some degree in our lives.

And I know, like, in school or in work, it can be hard. And many people, they may respect your faith, but there are also those who are hostile towards it as well.

Maybe not as openly, but in a maybe subtler, more subliminal ways. They know that you're a Christian and they avoid you. They don't want to be around you.

[23 : 49] Maybe you're overlooked for a promotion in work. Or maybe they ask you to do something that you know isn't the right thing to do. And you say no and they get angry at you.

And, you know, I know it's more clear in other countries how this persecution and suffering takes place. But I think we can also feel it here in some degree.

And Paul says this in Timothy, that all who live a godly life will be persecuted. And so what I want us to look at for the last couple of minutes is how do we actually go about living out our lives in a transformed community so that we can have an effect on the culture that we're living in?

And in the face of any hostility and rejection that we may face. And I think the most helpful way to do that is to, well, look at how Paul told this church here in Ephesus, how he told them to live.

And he wrote this letter to the Ephesians not in a vacuum. He didn't just think of whatever first thing came into his mind. He wrote it in the context of what these Christians in Ephesus were going through.

[25 : 05] And, you know, how they were living out their lives in real time, in a real community, despite whatever rejection and hostility they were facing.

And so what I want to do is just finish by reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, you know, to the Christians that were living in the city of Ephesus, and just hear a little bit about what he was calling them to do.

And I think it would be very helpful for you if over the next week you had some time even just to read through this letter of the Ephesians.

And you can tie it back to these people who are living in Ephesus. All the things that have happened over these last two weeks in the city of Ephesus, those are the people he's talking about in this letter that he writes to this church, to the Ephesians.

So I'm just going to read from Ephesians chapter 4, and I'm going to start at verse 25 and read a few verses. It says that Paul says to these Ephesians, he says, Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

[26 : 20] In your anger do not sin. Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, brawling, and slander, along with every form of malice.

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us, and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.

[27 : 36] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk, or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. And then these last two verses, I think, are so important.

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live then as children of light, for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth.

And find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. And so as we live in our communities, in Skibreen and around West Cork, we are called to live, as the Ephesians were here, to live as children of light.

We are to be a light to people. You know, we are to have nothing to do, it says, with this unwholesome talk, with coarse joking, with stealing, but we are called to be honest with our lips, to speak truth to people, to be kind and compassionate, and to love one another just as Christ loved us, and as he forgave us.

You know, it affects everything, from how we work, to how we talk to other people, how we interact with them, how we do everything. It affects our whole lives.

[29 : 01] So let's, as God's people, let us be children of light, who bring light to others, and bring them out of the darkness, and into God's glorious light.

Let's pray. Father, we just come to you this morning, and we give you praise, that you are a God full of light.

And Father, we pray, that in our lives, that you would guide us, and help us. We thank you that you have given us, that ultimate power, that has transformed our lives, that has brought us from, that has brought us from, the kingdom of darkness, into the kingdom of light.

We thank you that you have given us, the power of the Holy Spirit, to work in our lives, so that we can live lives, that are pleasing to you, and that we can live lives, that can have a positive effect, on the community around us.

And God, we ask for your help, and we pray that, in our lives, during this next week, and as we, during this year of 2025, would you help us to be people, that would have an effect, on our communities.

[30 : 31] Not a negative effect, but a positive effect, that would reflect Christ, in our lives, to the community around us. Help us to love others, in the way we talk to them, in how we interact with them, in the way we do things, God, would you help us, to live lives, of light.

would you be with us, and would you, strengthen us, in maybe the doubts, we may have sometimes, in our lives, and help us to, trust you in all things, and to follow you, through the ups and downs, even when there is, persecution, and people may, reject us, and we might find it hard, when maybe people, step away from us, because, we are Christians.

we ask that you, would give us strength, and that you, would give us love, and help us to forgive, those who hurt us, God. So be with us now, and just bless the rest, of our time together, we pray.

Amen.